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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001489

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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK  
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/YERGER/MCDERMOTT

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [IR](#) [RS](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI CONCERNED ABOUT ISRAEL AND  
PERCEIVED U.S. MOVES TOWARD SYRIA

REF: A. BEIRUT 1407  
[1](#)B. BEIRUT 1454

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) In a wide-ranging October 15 discussion with the Ambassador, majority leader Saad Hariri said he anticipated meeting Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah "soon," explaining that such a meeting would fulfill his own political agenda by giving other Shia a green light to enter into discussions with March 14. Claiming that Nasrallah feared another war with Israel, Hariri said he shared this fear because, while it might only temporarily hinder Hizballah, "it would be the death of March 14." Hariri also voiced his concern about Syrian troops on the border with Lebanon, and complained about perceived U.S. "engagement" with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem.

[1](#)2. (C) Hariri criticized Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun's trip to Iran the week of October 13, but noted that it did not seem to cost Aoun any popular support. On the spring 2009 parliamentary elections, Hariri rejected independent MP Michel Murr's assertion that the currently opposition-aligned Armenian Tashnaq would make a deal with Murr and Hariri. Hariri praised the October 11 arrest of individuals from a Fatah al-Islam linked terrorist cell, saying it resulted in good information relating to the recent string of attacks against the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces. End summary.

WILL MEET NASRALLAH "SOON"  
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[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador and DCM, accompanied by PolOff, met majority leader Saad Hariri, advisor Nader Hariri, and notetaker Nadine Chehab at Qoreitem on October 15. Responding to daily media speculation as to when Hariri would meet with Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, Hariri said his advisors were "still studying" difficult factors such as timing and location, but that it would happen "soon."

[1](#)4. (C) Recounting his meeting with Hizballah MP Mohammed Raad in September (Ref A), Hariri said it was a "reconciliation"

meeting, adding the caveat that both sides had their own political agendas. Hariri identified his agenda as eliminating reasons for Shia-Sunni "in-fighting" and better-positioning himself to talk to other Shia figures. Hariri reasoned that if certain Shia saw Hariri talking to Nasrallah, they would feel they also have a green light to talk to Hariri. Ambassador noted that Hariri had launched an effort to engage with certain Lebanese Shia after his July trip to Iraq and asked whether these contacts had continued. Hariri replied in the affirmative. He added that Nasrallah needed the meeting more than he did because Nasrallah feared an Israeli attack in Lebanon and wanted to get his domestic house in order.

WAR WITH ISRAEL  
WOULD KILL MARCH 14  
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15. (C) Hariri confessed that he shared Nasrallah's fear of a war with Israel. Asserting that some in Israel and the U.S. believe Israel should clear Lebanon of Hizballah "once and for all," Hariri warned that such a move would only temporarily put Hizballah out of commission because Iran and Syria would rebuild Hizballah's presence in Lebanon. Moreover, he argued, the Sunnis and Christians would lose because Israel would be fighting a nation, not just Hizballah. "It would be the death of March 14," he portended.

SYRIA TESTING THE WATERS  
WITH TROOP DEPLOYMENT  
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16. (C) Hariri railed against the recent Syrian troop deployment. After the string of assassinations, including his own father's, how dare Syria move its troops to the border with Lebanon claiming that Lebanon has a problem with terrorists, he argued. He speculated that Syria was not preparing for an invasion, but was testing the waters. He said that Syria typically takes an action, and then waits for the reaction. If there was no formidable reaction, Syria would grow bolder, he predicted.

17. (C) Nevertheless, Hariri said, Syria was not afraid of the international community's reaction. Since Syrian President Bashar Asad is president for life, he would not be concerned about losing French or British contacts in the short-term. Hariri said that if Asad thought Syria would be bombed because of its military buildup, he would withdraw the troops.

U.S. "HARMS ITS REPUTATION"  
BY TALKING TO SYRIA  
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18. (C) Hariri complained about perceived recent U.S. "engagement" with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem. Noting that Egypt and Saudi Arabia were not talking to Syria, he said the U.S. risked losing Arab support, which it currently enjoyed, especially in Lebanon and Iraq, by "talking to Damascus." This was particularly relevant, he explained, when the U.S. solicited Egyptian and Saudi support in Iraq -- their willingness to help would decrease following any U.S. engagement with Syria. Ambassador noted that the U.S. had clearly conveyed to FM Muallem the U.S. benchmarks, including Syrian support for destabilizing elements in the Middle East, Syria's support for terror, and Syria's human rights record. The U.S. had also underscored publicly the need for Lebanon's sovereignty. Furthermore, as Secretary Rice had said publicly, the U.S. supported the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, but noted this needed to be built on mutual respect. Normalization also had to include delineation of the border and an end to arms transfers via Syria in violation of UNSCR 1701. Hariri said he feared that the U.S. administration's current focus was on "leaving a legacy," which could be to the detriment of

its popularity in the Arab world.

¶9. (C) Hariri acknowledged that Iranian officials continued to invite him to Tehran, and implied good naturedly that the U.S. was in "no position" to weigh in on his trips, since he would not be surprised to see U.S. officials going to Syria and Iran some day. Nevertheless, he said he would only go if it served Lebanon's "vital interests."

AOUN'S VISIT TO IRAN:  
A "LOW BLOW" TO SLEIMAN  
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¶10. (C) Hariri, who had met President Michel Sleiman earlier in the day, assessed that Sleiman's October 11-12 trip to Saudi Arabia, coupled with Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea's trip to Cairo the same week, were positive steps, particularly for Lebanese Christians. However, Hariri criticized Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun's trip to Iran, which coincided with Sleiman's stop in Jeddah. "It was a low blow to Sleiman," he scowled, "and also a message to Saudi Arabia. He lamented that the trip had not seemed to cost Aoun any public support.

¶11. (C) Returning to Sleiman, Hariri reported that Saudi King Abdullah was happy with the visit and that Sleiman had made a good impression. Hariri accused Syria of intentionally choosing to establish diplomatic relations with Lebanon this week in order to "steal the headlines" from Sleiman's visit to Saudi Arabia.

FOREIGN TRAVEL: RUSSIA, IRAQ, EGYPT AND EUROPE  
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¶12. (C) "All I want is to win the (spring 2009 parliamentary) elections," Hariri stated. He said he was planning another

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trip to Iraq in the near-term, and anticipated making future campaign trips to Tripoli (Lebanon), the Bekaa, and Sidon, as well as visits to Europe and Egypt, "to counterbalance Syria." He added that he would travel to Russia to meet Russian PM Vladimir Putin in October or November. According to Hariri, Russia was working on a business deal with Saudi Arabia that ultimately would separate Russia from Iran. He said that he would seek Sleiman's approval before major trips.

NO TRUST FOR THE TASHNAQ  
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¶13. (C) Noting that it was too soon to form lists for the election, he said that by the end of the year, Geagea, former President and Kataeb leader Amine Gemayel, independent MP Michel Murr, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, and himself would decide the lists. In the meantime, it was important for March 14 to reestablish itself with its voting public.

¶14. (C) Michel Murr had expressed confidence that Hariri and the currently opposition-aligned Armenian Tashnaq would make a deal in the lead-up to the elections (Ref B). Hariri rejected that prospect, calling the Tashnaq "a bunch of liars." Claiming that the Tashnaq had betrayed his father on a political agreement 1996, he said it was unlikely the Tashnaq would align themselves with March 14. He added that Tashnaq did not need an alliance because it could win seats in Beirut likely to go to Armenians without one. Since Tashnaq is seen as close to Iran, only a split between Iran and Syria would pull the Tashnaq away from the pro-Syrian opposition, he predicted. (Note: The same day, Murr received delegations from Hizballah and the Syrian Baath party in Lebanon. Murr reported to EmbOffs that the delegations were pressuring him to form a joint list with Aoun in the Metn district, an offer Murr told us he declined. End note.)

ARRESTS IN TRIPOLI

¶15. (S/NF) Hariri reported that the October 11 arrests in Tripoli provided Lebanese security services with good information from one detained individual, who is allegedly a member of a terrorist cell linked to Fatah al-Islam and responsible for attacks against the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF). Hariri said that this individual had numbers for contacts in Damascus. At a minimum, Hariri said, it proved the Salafists had nothing to do with the attacks against the LAF and ISF. Separately, Hariri requested USG assistance in tracking down information on Omar Bakri, a cleric suspected of having al-Qaeda ties and is reportedly linked to Syrian intelligence.

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